

TITLE: SAN DIEGO GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY (SDG&E) VALLEY-RAINBOW 500KV INTERCONNECT PROJECT

SUMMARY:

Provide status of this proposed 500 kV electrical transmission line connecting electrical substations in the communities of Rainbow, San Diego County to Romoland, Riverside County, CA.

ISSUES:

Located within northern San Diego County and western Riverside County, this proposal involves a 31 mile long 500 kV electrical transmission line that would connect the proposed SDG&E Rainbow Substation, on Rainbow Heights Road near the community of Rainbow in San Diego County, and Southern California Edison Company's(SCE) existing 500 kV transmission system at the Valley Substation on Menifee Road, Romoland, Riverside County. A second 230 kV line would also be added to the existing Talega to Escondido 230 kV transmission line on Camp Pendleton and private lands in San Diego County, and voltage support upgrades would be made to SDG&E's existing Mission, Miguel and Sycamore Canyon substations.

On March 23, 2001, SDG&E filed an application with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) for a certificate of public convenience and necessity for this project. On June 29, 2001, SDG&E submitted a right-of-way application to the BLM for this project. The BLM and the CPUC are now preparing a joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for this proposal. The CPUC held public scoping meetings on this project from July 10-12, 2001 in the communities of Temecula, Winchester and Pauma Valley and accepted scoping comments through August 7, 2001. The BLM actively participated as a partner agency in these scoping meetings. The BLM and CPUC held an additional scoping open house in Temecula on January 8, 2002 and are accepting additional scoping comments through February 4, 2002.

This scoping process has resulted in substantial comment that is broadly summarized as concerns about environmental issues, growth inducement, purpose and need for the project as well as a lack of consideration to other feasible alternatives to the project. Possible impacts of the project were submitted by the public including those associated with quality of life, property values, visual and aesthetic qualities of the area, economics of the wine making businesses and other agricultural operations, schools and parks, community and residential development, general recreation, hot air ballooning and human health.

The proposed project crosses lands owned in fee by the Pechanga Band of Mission Indians, referred to as the Great Oak property. The property includes a 1,500-year old great oak that the Pechanga state holds special values for their people. The Pechanga have requested that the Department of the Interior accept the lands into trust on behalf of the Tribe. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) in July, 2001 that analyzed the impacts of this trust action, involving thirty-one parcels and totalling 688.73 acres. The BIA issued a Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this proposal on August 31, 2001. On October 1, 2001, SDG&E and parent company, Semptra Energy, filed a Notice of Appeal with the U.S. Department of the Interior Board of Indian Appeals pertaining to this FONSI. The BIA is presently reviewing the trust proposal and a decision may be issued in the near future. The Pechanga have publicly expressed opposition to the proposed alignment across the Ranch and have been seeking public and political support for this position. More than 2,000 letters of support have been received by BIA and Sen. Barbara Boxer and Rep. Darryl Issa have both voiced concerns about project's impact on the Pechanga's land. Sen. Boxer and Rep. Issa have both tried to address the issue legislatively and a hearing may be scheduled soon on HR 3523. This change in land status would preclude SDG&E from condemning a right-of-way across these lands and would require SDG&E to negotiate any alignment across the ranch with the Pechanga and BIA.

Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District (EVMWD) is proposing combining the Valley Rainbow 500 kV proposal with their Talega-Escondido/Valley-Serrano 500 kV Interconnect Project (TE/VS Interconnect Project) into one EIS/EIR. The USFS-Trabuco Ranger District, as the lead Federal Agency for the TE/VS Interconnect Project, is preparing a NOI for this project. Both projects would provide a north-south 500 kV interconnect between SDG&E and SCE. The TE/VS Project is being considering as one of the alternatives to the Valley Rainbow line in the alternative screening process and a joint strategy is being initiated with the USFS to handle these two projects and the EVMWD proposal.

The BLM and CPUC are presently analyzing and screening over 25 alternatives to this project that were submitted during the scoping process and are initiating development of the draft EIS/EIR. A tentative release date for the draft EIS/EIR is August, 2002.

STATUS:

The BLM is lead Federal agency for the preparation of the EIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable laws and regulations.